



# San Diego County Local Agency Formation Commission

Regional Service Planning | Subdivision of the State of California

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**AGENDA REPORT**  
Business | Discussion

February 3, 2025

**TO:** Commissioners

**FROM:** Keene Simonds, Executive Officer  
Joelle Burila, Analyst I

**SUBJECT:** CALAFCO Update and Non-Renewal of Membership in FY2026

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## SUMMARY

The San Diego County Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) will receive an update on CALAFCO regarding previously reported governance and administrative concerns. The update substantiates these concerns in greater depth and marked by increasing Board underperformance and – by direct extension – diminishing membership services. Consistent with policy delegations and earlier telegraphing, staff intends to provide notice that San Diego LAFCO will not renew its annual membership for the upcoming fiscal year. The expected savings totals \$30,000, which staff will redirect towards partnering with other LAFCOs that have and/or expected to take similar actions to leave CALAFCO. The update is being presented to the Commission for information with the opportunity to provide related feedback.

## BACKGROUND

CALAFCO is a non-profit organization created in 1971 to assist member LAFCOs with learning and related resources as well as legislative advocacy. San Diego LAFCO has been a member of CALAFCO for most of its existence except for a one-year withdraw in 2009-2010 due to representation concerns with the Board. Key membership services include maintaining multiple list-serves and hosting annual conferences and workshops. Annual member dues serve as the primary revenue source to help fund an approximate \$0.780 million budget. A 16-member Board oversees CALAFCO and appoints a fulltime Executive Director to administer day-to-day activities. All LAFCOs are currently members except Kern County.

### Administration

Keene Simonds, Executive Officer  
2550 Fifth Avenue, Suite 725  
San Diego, California 92103  
T 619.321.3380  
E [lafco@sdcountry.ca.gov](mailto:lafco@sdcountry.ca.gov)  
[www.sdlafco.org](http://www.sdlafco.org)

Joel Anderson  
County of San Diego

Jim Desmond  
County of San Diego

Vacant, Alt.  
County of San Diego

Kristi Becker  
City of Solana Beach

Dane White  
City of Escondido

John McCann Alt.  
City of Chula Vista

Chair Stephen Whitburn  
City of San Diego

Marni von Wilpert, Alt.  
City of San Diego

Vice Chair Barry Willis  
Alpine Fire Protection

Jo MacKenzie  
Vista Irrigation

David Drake, Alt.  
Rincon del Diablo

Harry Mathis  
General Public

Brigitte Browning, Alt.  
General Public

## DISCUSSION

This item is being presented to San Diego LAFCO to receive an update on CALAFCO involving previously reported governance and administrative concerns as well as staff's associated reasonings to proceed now with a non-renewal notice for 2025-2026. The item expands on an initial update to the Commission at the November 2024 meeting where staff noted increasing disharmony within CALAFCO and its decision-making processes. This included shared staff contents of their earlier letter to CALAFCO outlining specific concerns and notice that San Diego LAFCO would revisit its membership status for the upcoming fiscal year. The earlier item concluded with staff committing to return to discuss any further developments.

### Shared Membership Concerns and CALAFCO Board January 10<sup>th</sup>, 2025 Meeting

Since the Commission's November 2024 meeting, staff has continued to monitor CALAFCO activities and communicate with other LAFCOs regarding shared concerns. These communications prompted nearly two dozen Executive Officers – including San Diego's – to issue a joint-letter to CALAFCO on December 23, 2024. The joint-letter details specific missteps by CALAFCO over the last year that commonly reflect the organization deprioritizing transparency and practitioner input. The joint-letter – pertinently – was issued ahead of CALAFCO holding a regular Board meeting on January 10<sup>th</sup>, 2025 in Sacramento in which the Board had committed to addressing membership concerns. This commitment – however – did not materialize; no substantive discussions or actions were taken by the Board on January 10<sup>th</sup>. Instead, and with staff in attendance along with several other member guests from across the state, the Board deviated from the published agenda. It proceeded to have a truncated discussion on membership communications before going into closed session for the balance of the day. Only after returning from closed session – several hours after its committed return time – did the Board announce all other agenda items would be continued to a future meeting.

## ANALYSIS

CALAFCO has experienced a significant loss of trust among the membership over the last several years and it directly ties to ongoing underperformance on the Board. Specifically, the Board has become apathetic and struggles to achieve quorums, divided into factions with leadership self-cycling among a favored few, and delivering less despite more funding. The Board's inactions on January 10<sup>th</sup> to engage concerned members and take accountability serves as a clear marker that San Diego LAFCO would be best served by not renewing its membership and redirecting resources to other opportunities benefitting the agency. This includes working with other LAFCOs that have (Kern and San Bernardino) or expected (Los Angeles, Orange, San Joaquin, and Ventura) to leave CALAFCO with respect to learning (education, training, and networking) and legislative advocacy services. Rejoining would remain an option going forward should CALAFCO make changes consistent with a bottom-up approach in prioritizing membership needs.

## RECOMMENDATION

This item is presented to San Diego LAFCO for information with an opportunity for discussion and feedback – including on staff’s intention to not renew membership with CALAFCO.

## ALTERNATIVES FOR ACTION

None.

## PROCEDURES

This item has been placed on San Diego LAFCO’s agenda for discussion as part of the business calendar. The following procedures are recommended in the consideration of this item:

- 1) Receive verbal presentation from staff unless waived.
- 2) Invite comments from interested audience members.
- 3) Discuss and provide feedback, as requested.

Respectfully,



Keene Simonds  
Executive Officer

Attachments:

- 1) San Diego LAFCO Executive Officer Letter to CALAFCO, October 22, 2024
- 2) Joint-Letter from LAFCO Executive Officers to CALAFCO, December 23, 2024

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# San Diego County Local Agency Formation Commission

Regional Service Planning | Subdivision of the State of California

October 22, 2024

**Delivered by Electronic Mail**

René LaRoche, Executive Director  
California Association of LAFCOs  
[rlaroch@calafco.org](mailto:rlaroch@calafco.org)

**SUBJECT: FY26 CALAFCO Dues and Related Concerns**

Dear René:

This letter serves as a courtesy to advise San Diego LAFCO will revisit its membership status with CALAFCO as part of the upcoming 2025-2026 budget process. San Diego remains committed to CALAFCO’s mission **“to promote efficient and sustainable government services based on local community values through legislative advocacy and education.”** San Diego – however – is respectfully concerned with CALAFCO’s direction and recent decisions that seemingly deprioritize – directly and indirectly – these core mission values. Examples include the unknown scale and influence of outside parties (consultants and attorneys) in CALAFCO decision-making as well as the insulated process leading to the elimination of the Legislative Committee. The deemphasis of the CALAFCO Executive Officer position and the related dismissal of the practitioner perspective in the Board’s decision-making process is equally concerning. It is our understanding the CALAFCO Board will hold a strategic planning retreat in early 2025. We hope the retreat is scheduled (location and time) and noticed to maximize all 58 LAFCOs’ ability to participate – including allowance for video attendance – and the above concerns are discussed in some meaningful way.

Sincerely,

Keene Simonds  
Executive Officer

cc: Commissioners  
Priscilla Mumpower, Assistant Executive Officer  
Steve Lucas, CALAFCO Executive Officer

<b>Administration</b> Keene Simonds, Executive Officer 2550 Fifth Avenue, Suite 725 San Diego, California 92103 T 619.321.3380 E <a href="mailto:lafco@sdcounty.ca.gov">lafco@sdcounty.ca.gov</a> www.sdlafco.org	<b>Joel Anderson</b> County of San Diego  <b>Jim Desmond</b> County of San Diego  <b>Nora Vargas, Alt.</b> County of San Diego	<b>Kristi Becker</b> City of Solana Beach  <b>Dane White</b> City of Escondido  <b>John McCann Alt.</b> City of Chula Vista	<b>Chair Stephen Whitburn</b> City of San Diego  <b>Marni von Wilpert, Alt.</b> City of San Diego	<b>Vice Chair Barry Willis</b> Alpine Fire Protection  <b>Jo MacKenzie</b> Vista Irrigation  <b>David Drake, Alt.</b> Rincon del Diablo	<b>Harry Mathis</b> General Public  <b>Brigette Browning, Alt.</b> General Public
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December 23, 2024

CALAFCO Board of Directors

Subject: Concerns with the Direction of CALAFCO

Dear Members of the Board:

As you are aware, recent actions by the CALAFCO Board of Directors and the Executive Director have significantly undermined the decades of trust amongst CALAFCO and its membership. These actions have prompted multiple LAFcos to consider terminating their CALAFCO memberships if substantive changes to CALAFCO are not made (see letters attached from San Diego, Orange, and San Bernardino LAFcos). Although they have yet to do so in writing, several signatories to this letter are also considering recommending that their commissions terminate their CALAFCO memberships.

We are concerned that CALAFCO leadership has lost focus on its core mission. CALAFCO does not exist to serve the interests of the Board or individual board members. It does not exist to serve the interests of associate members or other outside entities. It certainly does not exist to serve the interests of the Executive Director or Legal Counsel. Until recently, CALAFCO's focus has always been on furthering the interests of the membership. The membership *is* the Association – the association of LAFcos. CALAFCO's focus on the interests of the membership must be restored in order to rebuild lost trust and to ensure the Association's survival.

The dissolution of the CALAFCO Legislative Committee and the secretive way it was undertaken clearly demonstrates this disregard of the opinions and desires of the membership. As stated in the September 27, 2024 letter to the CALAFCO Board from the Executive Officers of the majority of LAFcos (attached), the dissolution process lacked any meaningful outreach to the membership, and it was championed by a Board committee that intentionally withheld its recommendations from the membership and the Legislative Committee itself. It appears that Board members were misled as to the repercussions of their votes in July on this matter. Though the Board corrected this mistake during its September 30<sup>th</sup> special meeting when it reinstated the Legislative Committee, the damage to our trust was already done. The lack of outreach and transparency associated with the abolition of the Legislative Committee is not a one-off; rather, it exemplifies how CALAFCO currently operates. Discussion is limited to a small group; decisions are announced rather than formulated in a collaborative and iterative process; and members learn about actions only after they happen. This is not acceptable.

The deemphasis of LAFco practitioners in the CALAFCO decision-making process is both striking and troubling. The Executive Director is not a LAFco practitioner, and she is not qualified to advise the Board on matters related to the implementation of LAFco work without input from actual practitioners (who have consistently volunteered their time and expertise to support the Executive Director). The Executive Director's distancing of the CALAFCO Executive Officer (who serves as the membership's primary contact with CALAFCO) from the process is but one example. The dissolution of the Legislative Committee is another example of a systematic and deliberate attempt to deemphasize the role that LAFco practitioners play. The fact that the Executive Director has full

discretion to appoint regional executive officers and members of the Legislative Committee further undermines the membership's ability to appoint and empower LAFCo practitioners it feels will best represent its interests, as opposed to the interests of the Executive Director or individual board members.

Of further concern is CALAFCO's failure to adequately communicate with and build relationships with the membership. Little attempt has been made in recent years to introduce CALAFCO to our commissions or to personalize and "put a face" to CALAFCO. In addition, there are many examples of CALAFCO staff not responding to inquiries from Executive Officers, commissioners, and even CALAFCO Board members in a timely manner, if at all. This is unacceptable, and it further demonstrates a blatant disregard for the concerns of the membership.

In order to begin to rebuild the trust that has been lost, and hopefully to keep the Association intact, we insist that the Board implement the following items, *at a minimum*. Most of our requests can be addressed through changes to the by-laws or through adopted policies.

#### Membership Representation at CALAFCO

- *Selection of the CALAFCO Deputy Executive Officers:* Currently, the Executive Director chooses who serves as each region's Deputy Executive Officer (DEO). This arrangement may not necessarily best serve the interests of the membership. Regional DEOs should be chosen by the membership of each region. The LAFCos of each region should nominate candidates for their regional DEO and then vote.
- *Selection of the CALAFCO Executive Officer:* Currently, the Executive Director chooses who serves as the CALAFCO Executive Officer. This arrangement may not necessarily best serve the interests of the membership. The Executive Officer, who is one of the four regional DEOs, should be selected by and among the four regional DEOs.
- *Role of the CALAFCO Executive Officer:* The position of the CALAFCO Executive Officer should be clarified so that the Executive Officer plays an integral role in the operation of CALAFCO, as was previously the practice. The Executive Director should be required to consult with the Executive Officer on all items/issues of importance to the membership. The Executive Officer should play an active role in the development of meeting agendas, and should be invited to and included in all meetings of the Board, the Executive Committee, the Legislative Committee, any standing committee, any ad hoc committees, and others as needed. In the Executive Officer's absence, the other regional DEOs should be consulted. No action on items/issues important to the membership should be taken without such consultation.
- *Advisory Committee:* An Advisory Committee composed of the Executive Officer and the three regional DEOs should be established. The Executive Director must convene the Committee on an agreed upon schedule, to discuss items/issues of importance to the membership. Consideration should also be given to the formation of an advisory committee made up of LAFCo Executive Officers from the four regions.

### Legislative Committee

- *Selection of the members of Legislative Committee:* Currently, the Executive Director selects the LAFCo staff members who serve on the Legislative Committee. This arrangement fails to advance the interests of the membership. The members of the newly established Advisory Committee (the Executive Officer and three regional DEOs) should appoint LAFCo staff members to the Legislative Committee, or at the very least, approve appointments made by the Executive Director.
- *Remove Associate Members from the Legislative Committee:* Currently, three associate members (e.g., private consultants that do not staff LAFCos) sit on a committee that advises the Legislative Committee, and they are privy to all the confidential documentation, discussions, and strategizing that occurs during Committee meetings. Associate members do not necessarily share the goals of the Legislative Committee and may even represent clients who may be opposed to the Committee's recommendations, resulting in conflicts of interest. Associate members should not be permitted to attend meetings and/or participate in Legislative Committee business, unless their input is sought on an item and they are invited by the Chair.

### Transparency and Communication:

- *Transparency:* CALAFCO must operate in a manner that is not only transparent to the Board, but to the membership. Policies affecting the membership, the advancements of LAFCos, and the operations of the organization should be developed to ensure that member LAFCos are fully informed of matters important to them and input sought on such matters.
- *Communication:* The Executive Director should be encouraged to develop relationships with the membership and not focus solely on the members of the Board. Policies should also be developed to ensure that all inquiries from the membership and Board members are responded to in a timely manner.

When the San Bernadino LAFCo was considering whether to continue as a member of CALAFCO at its November 13<sup>th</sup> meeting, the staff report prepared for the item concluded with the following:

“Recently, there has been some concern about the recent decisions made by the CALAFCO Board, including the perceived lack of transparency and membership engagement. There has also been some disagreement and disunity among the new Board. It should also be noted that, in the past, there used to be a close collaboration between the CALAFCO Executive Director, its regional officers, and LAFCO executive officers in general, which resulted in more agreement and coming up with better solutions to issues and/or concerns. Lately, there hasn't been a congenial relationship between the CALAFCO Executive Director and many of the regional officers/executive officers resulting in dissatisfaction and frustration among the membership.”

As you know, the San Bernardino LAFCo chose to not renew its membership for next year. We see the January 10<sup>th</sup> Board meeting as the last opportunity for the Board to “right the ship” before

additional LAFcos consider terminating their membership. Absent substantive changes, such as those suggested herein, CALAFCO is at risk of fracturing, or even dissolving, as an association. We hope the Board takes our concerns seriously and embraces these suggestions, or other meaningful suggestions, in order to preserve CALAFCO and all the value that it has historically provided.

Sincerely,



Kai Luoma  
Ventura LAFCo



Keene Simonds  
San Diego LAFCo

Steve Lucas

Steve Lucas  
Butte LAFCo



Paul Novak  
LAFCo for LA County



Bill Nicholson  
Merced LAFCo



Rob Fitzroy  
San Luis Obispo LAFCo



Jennifer Stephenson  
Lassen, Modoc, Plumas, and  
San Benito LAFcos



Tyler Salcido  
Imperial LAFCo



Neelima Palacherla  
LAFCo of Santa Clara  
County



Uma Hinman  
Mendocino LAFCo



J.D. Hightower  
San Joaquin LAFCo



Sara Lytle-Pinhey  
Stanislaus LAFCo



Michelle McIntyre  
Placer LAFCo



Larkyn Fielor  
Colusa and Lake LAFcos

Jason Fried

Jason Fried  
Marin LAFCo



Chuck Kinney  
Kings LAFCo



SR Jones  
Nevada LAFCo

CC: Rene LaRoche, CALAFCO Executive Director

Attachments - Letter to CALAFCO from San Diego LAFCo dated 10-22-24  
Letter to CALAFCO from Orange LAFCo dated 11-1-24  
Letter to CALAFCO from San Bernardino LAFCo dated 11-22-24  
Letter to CALAFCO regarding dissolution of the Legislative Committee dated 9-27-24